

a *mohana* of Bramhyderi named Suleiman volunteered to enter the cave with a light and a length of rope, a common practice in Sind, to catch the hyaena alive. On entering the cave Suleiman was badly mauled by the animal inside. He was taken to hospital but his wounds turned septic and he died of blood poisoning.

In the meanwhile a strong fishing net was placed over the mouth of the cave and information sent to the police station at Malir, about 6 miles away. On the arrival of the police, some *zamindars* and a horde of men armed to the teeth with guns, spears and clubs the animal was driven out of the cave and shot, speared and clubbed almost to pieces.

The cave contained besides many old bones the remains of a freshly killed pi dog.

The skin of the panther which was secured through the courtesy of Mr. Maqbul Khan, measured 6 feet 8 inches from tip of nose to end of tail, the tail measuring 2 feet 6 inches.

The skin which was seen by Captain Alec Salmon, H.L.I., shortly after it came into my possession in April 1939 is now with H. O. Wood of the Sind Police.

KARACHI,

July 20, 1943.

K. R. EATES,

Indian Police.

F.Z.S., M.B.O.U.

Note.—This, so far as I am aware, is the first record of a black panther occurring in Sind. According to Sind District Gazetteers, 21 panthers have been killed in Sind from 1896 to 1915, and all except 2 of these were killed in Karachi district. Since 1920 several panthers have been shot in the Pabh hills in Las Bela State about 30 miles from Karachi, the last 2 falling to the gun of G. Grosenbacher on the 24-12-36. As pi dogs were disappearing from Mangho Pir, about 10 miles north of Karachi in the direction of the Pabh hills, in March 1939, it is likely that this black panther was responsible and came from the Pabh hills, moving S.-E. through broken country to Rerhi where it was killed as related above. The occurrence of a black panther in Sind or even in the Pabh hills, where conditions in no way favour melanism, is most remarkable and indeed a rarity.

K. R. E.

III.—ON THE OCCURRENCE OF THE YELLOW-HEADED FANTAIL WARBLER (*CISTICOLA EXILIS TYTLERI* JERDON) IN THE KUMAON TARAI, U.P.

The distribution of this species is given by Stuart Baker (*Nidif. Ind. Birds*, ii, 378) as 'from the Bhutan Doors to Eastern Assam, Bengal, Manipur, Lushai, Chin and Kachin Hills to Yunnan from the foothills and plains up to about 2,500 feet.'

Lalkua (Kumaon district) is a junction in two senses: it is a railway junction 14 miles from the well-known rail-head of

Kathgodam; and it is close to the junction of those two ecologically very different types of country, the Bhabar and the Tarai. The Tarai here consists of high grass with a few Semal trees (*Bombax malabaricum*) dotted about, and occasional clumps of high forest. Two miles along the Forest Department road to Dauli, and just on the northern fringe of the Tarai, is an open grassy space about 400 yards long by 200 yards wide; it is separated from the road by a strip of forest about 50 yards wide, and on the western and southern sides also is bounded by high forest, but to the east the ground falls away down a bank to the open park-like Shisham (*Dalbergia sissoo*) forest fringing the Gola river. The altitude is about 700 feet above sea level, and the map co-ordinates Lat. 29° 03 ft. N. Long. 79° 33 ft. E.

It is a quiet and peaceful spot, this grassy *chaor*.¹ The grass grows to a height of about 8 ft. during the rains, and then is gradually burnt back by a succession of fires that sweep through the area in the hot weather, the last of them as late as the end of May, or early June; the first showers bring up the young grass amongst the dead and blackened stems of the previous year. On this fresh green growth the cheetal love to graze, and there one may watch them of an evening and listen to the hoarse wheezy mating call of the stags in the surrounding forest.

It was while watching some cheetal that a peculiar note, unknown to me, attracted my attention: a soft churr followed after a short interval by a musical or fluty bell-like note, exactly as described by Stuart Baker (*Nidif. Ind. Birds ii*, 379) except that I could not detect any ventriloquial quality in it. To my ear it was quite obvious that both notes were made by the same bird: a tiny bird perched on a dead grass-stem; the whole head and under-parts appeared buff or bleached straw-colour, closely matched by the colour of the dead grass stem, except for a buffy-brown half collar on the nape and sides of the neck; the upper-parts were streaked brown and the short tail blackish. Then the bird took flight and I knew at once what it was, though I had never seen it before. To explain how this came about a short digression may perhaps be permitted.

Oates (*Birds of Burmah i*, 118) wrote 'The Golden-headed Fantail-Warbler' (*Cisticola exilis equicaudata* Stuart Baker) 'occurs plentifully in the plain lying near the Pegu Canal and also along the embankment running from Myetkyo to the Tunghoo Road. It is not universally distributed over the plain, but occurs in a few places only'. No ornithologist has found it since in the above area, though Mackenzie is said to have found it breeding in the Prome district (*Nidif. Ind. Birds ii*, 381). Stanford, who worked the Sittang plain, did not meet with it; H. C. Smith and I spent some days at Myitkyo (=Myetkyo) in early July 1941, and though we searched the banks of the Pegu Canal right down to Waw, and also the embankment running to the Toungoo road, we failed to discover a single bird. Much of the area that was high grass in Oates's day has long since been converted into paddy fields, and we concluded that *C. e. equicaudata* no longer

¹ Local term for an open area of grass in the forest.

occurs in its old haunts (whereas we were able to prove that *Chrysonna a. altirostris* Jerdon, another species found by Oates in the same area and not since recorded, is still to be found in some grassy swamps north of Myitkyo). Although our hunt for *exilis* proved unsuccessful we had learnt by heart the description of this bird and its musical note; and here was this elusive species cropping up where it had no right to be at all, hundreds of miles from its nearest known haunt, the Bhutan Duars!

I was much puzzled by the pale and bleached appearance of the bird, very different from the yellow bird depicted in the plate given in vol. ii of the *F.B.I.* I first saw it on the 30th May, and thought perhaps it was moulting and would turn yellow a week or two later; but when I was next able to revisit the *chaor*, on the 8th July, the bird presented exactly the same appearance, so I reluctantly decided I should have to try and obtain a specimen; unfortunately I had nothing but no. 6 shot, and spent an extremely hot 2 hours on the 9th, and again on the 11th, before I eventually succeeded. The two specimens obtained were sent to the B.N.H.S., where the Curator kindly examined them and confirmed the identification as *C. exilis*; in a letter he remarks that to all appearances the birds belong to the race *tylleri*, but as there are only two specimens available in the Bombay Museum for comparison the race can only be properly determined at the British Museum.

There were certainly 3, possibly 4, pairs of birds in the *chaor*, each with a well-defined territory. The male bird would circle over his territory in a characteristic flight. The 'take-off' would be straight, but rising steadily for 50 yards or so, after which the bird commenced to circle, rising steadily to a considerable height: I estimated 150 feet was about the average. At this height he would circle for varying periods, sometimes for 5 minutes or more, until he had had enough or until he saw another bird trespassing over his territory. In either case the descent was most dramatic: an almost vertical nose-dive at astonishing speed, so fast that the eye could scarcely follow him, flattening out when only a few feet above the earth and returning to his perch with swift darting erratic flight. Twice I saw him dive at a trespasser, the first time at a swallow and the second at another *C. exilis*, and chase him out of the territory, twisting and turning with great rapidity, after which he rose again to continue his flight. Normally however he dropped back to the grass, sometimes down out of sight but at other times alighting on a conspicuous perch.

Throughout the flight the male utters his characteristic note, a wheeze or nasal bleat followed after a momentary interval by a musical note with a noticeable 'r' or roll in it; the nasal bleat is sometimes monosyllabic, at other times bi-syllabic with a drop in pitch. During the take-off, and again when he has made up his mind to descend, a series of short staccato nasal bleats on a monotone is uttered. The soft churr followed by the musical note uttered from a perch is, I think, an alarm note: a warning to the female to leave the nest.

This flight of the male may be a display flight, but my impression was that its main function was to enable him to protect his territory.

My observations did not extend over a sufficient period to give reliable data as to the frequency of the flight, but I noted (a) that there was nearly always at least one bird out of the 3 or 4 on the wing, and that a bird seemed to rest for about 10 minutes between flights if not disturbed (b) that the flight is carried out both morning and evening, and probably throughout the day (I visited the *chaor* from 9 to 11 a.m. and from 5 to 8 p.m.).

By good fortune there were 1 or 2 pairs of *Cisticola juncidis* breeding in the same *chaor*, so that I was able to compare the flights and songs of the two species.

The songs are of course entirely different, that of *juncidis* being merely a series of sharp clicks, and no one who has once heard both could possibly confuse the two. The display flights are also noticeably different, though the authorities content themselves with saying that they are much the same; in actual fact the display flight of *exilis* is faster, smoother (not nearly so jerky and undulating), and the circling is done at a considerably greater height. Also it is generally much more sustained: or so I thought, staring up at a small speck in a blazing sky for what seemed an eternity, to mark where the bird eventually came to earth. The flight-action of *exilis* consists of a series of very rapid wing-beats followed by a period with wings closed, giving rise to a gentle undulation.

The female I saw but seldom. As Stuart Baker writes (*Nidif. Ind. Birds ii*, 380) she usually gets up, flies straight and low for 50 yards or so, and drops back into the grass; but I did on one occasion see the female rise up to the male in the course of his display flight and after they had flown side by side for a short period, both uttering the characteristic note, they both dropped back to the grass close by, where I shot the female after missing the male (I assume it was a female, but the specimen was too badly damaged to be sexed).

It would round off this account to describe the finding of a nest but in this I failed. By the 11th July the grass was dense and 5 ft. high, and it might have taken days to track down a nest; that the birds were breeding there can be little doubt.

In the first week of August I saw and heard several birds calling over the high grass east of Kichha station, about 10 miles south of Lalkua, in an area I had worked carefully in the cold weather without seeing *exilis*. It may therefore be a summer immigrant from further east; people seldom visit the Tarai (notorious for its malaria) in the rains, which would account for this species having been overlooked in this area in the past. I suspect that it is local but widely distributed in the Tarai during the rains.

Another interesting species breeding in the *chaor* is the Eastern Moustached Sedge Warbler (*Luscinola melanopogon nymica* Madarász). According to Stuart Baker many specimens have been obtained from Etawah, but there seems to be no record of its breeding in the U.P. I saw only one bird, but from the way it fussed round me with a grub in its bill it obviously had a nest-full of young closeby. As it worked round me in a quarter circle at a distance of about 10 yards, scolding gently the while I had excellent views with glasses at different angles in a good light, and although I

had never previously seen this species I had no difficulty in identifying it as the Sedge Warbler from its distinctive colouration. There were several reed-like clumps of grass nearby, and if I had had the time to search I believe the nest would have been found in one of them.

C/O IMPERIAL BANK OF INDIA,
NAINI TAL,
August 8, 1943.

B. E. SMYTHIES,
Burma Forest Service.

IV.—OCCURRENCE OF THE GOLDEN ORIOLE AND COMMON CUCKOO IN SIND.

Both the Indian Golden Oriole and the Common Cuckoo occur in Sind at the time of seasonal migrations.

As they rarely come under observation, may I add the following to the few existing records.

1. Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus kundoo*) ♂ seen at Jamesabad, Thar and Parkar District, on 16-4-43.

2. Common Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus* ssp.) specimen obtained at Samaro, Thar and Parkar District on 13-4-43 ♂ Wing 225 mm.

KARACHI,
June 5, 1943.

N. H. MENESSE, I.S.E.,
Superintending Engineer,
Eastern Sind Circle.

V.—THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE GREY HORNBILL (*TOCKUS BIROSTRIS*) AND TICKELL'S FLOWER-PECKER (*PIPRISOMA AGILE?*).

Both Whistler and Salim Ali in their books quote that the Grey Hornbill is absent from the Punjab. Here in Sialkot I have seen a party of 6 on several occasions. The birds are very fond of a peepal, which has four bees' nests suspended from its boughs, and also of a species of fig tree in the Kashmir Residency Garden in which a pair nested. The tree had two holes of sizable proportions for the hornbill, the bigger and better hole was occupied by a couple of mynahs. Try as they would, the pair of hornbills could not oust the mynahs from the possession of their home. Eventually the hornbills gave up and became quite content with the second best hole. I left Sialkot while the hornbills were nesting.

Again, in both of the books of the above-quoted authors, I find that they exclude this part of the Punjab in their distribution paragraph of Tickell's Flower-pecker. I have been watching these